

Let's talk money: Guidelines for tackling finances & Alzheimer's

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Throughout the past year, we've touched on many topics relating to safety and advanced planning in terms of Alzheimer's and related dementia. This month's topic addresses both safety and planning, and is often one of the most challenging 'hurdles' I see for families...finances. Trouble with managing bills and managing finances is often one of the early warning signs of Alzheimer's and other types of progressive dementia. It can be very challenging for a person who is experiencing cognitive changes to successfully pay bills, manage investments, or even make good judgments on purchases. Often, when I meet with families, they've already had crises surrounding finances that they had to resolve, whether it is an overdraft fee, changing the payout of a pension, or being scammed by a smooth salesperson. The tips below are meant to help prevent these moments and help prepare a family for addressing concerns surrounding finances.

-Complete a financial Power of Attorney document

One of the first questions I always ask: Have you completed a power of attorney document for healthcare and finances? This is an essential first step to ensure that you will legally be able to support your loved one as the disease progresses and worsens. Encouraging a loved one to complete these documents after a diagnosis or as soon as you are starting to notice changes is critical. Once complete, share the documents with banks, insurance companies, pensions plans and anyone who would need to know that you are able to help your loved one with financial decisions.

-Consider setting up online banking and credit card accounts

This is an easy way to monitor accounts without infringing on your loved one's access. If you aren't comfortable with online accounts, enlist the help of a close family member who can help.

-Limit ATM withdrawal amounts and access to credit cards/checks

Limiting amounts that a loved one can withdrawal or spend can help prevent access to people who might try to take advantage of them in a vulnerable state. Unfortunately, there are people who might not behave in the most ethical way, or just simply not understand your loved one's

cognitive impairment. I've had several clients whose loved ones spent thousands of dollars on items that were sold to them in this way. Setting limits can help ensure your loved one is not taken advantage of or be put in a vulnerable situation.

-Have your loved one 'teach' you

Being able to make financial decisions is closely tied with a person's independence and self-worth. A person still needs to feel that they are in control and contributing. I've worked with many caregivers who try having their loved one 'teach' them how to pay bills, look at their accounts, etc. This is not only a meaningful and important activity to do together, but it also emphasizes the independence of your loved one. Alzheimer's disease does not take away a person's need to have purpose and meaning – help your loved one fulfill that need as well as having a good handle on the financial situation to prevent any mistakes or incidents.

For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.